



Integration of Student Interest Into Learning



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ABSTRACT

The goal of the Community Service Learning project was developing PBL method with an emphasis on 3 target habits of mind. These habits of mind focused on applying previous knowledge, listening and understanding, and cultivating joy in the classroom. This manifested into an afterschool “Game Club” where students are given a safe place to share a common interest with their peers. Built on the 7 essential PBL design elements, students were able to joint construct the club and its rules and goals. For some club members, since the clubs inception, significant improvement in the classroom can be seen. Additionally students have expressed interest in game development and computer programming. For these students, I’ve been developing a curriculum on “serious gaming” where students can learn the fundamentals of coding and trouble shooting.

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INTRODUCTION

Community Service Learning (CSL) involves the action and reflection of students with a goal of a deep understanding. Through this process students become better learners and active members of a community. PBL was used as an outline for the project, focusing on the 7 Essential Design Elements.

Several students in 8th grade Science struggle with confidence and comfort in the classroom. It appears that by 8th grade, many students who struggle feel locked in that role.² Three Habits of Mind were selected as a focus with a goal of creating a discourse with these students to foster a more welcoming classroom community.

The first step was integrating interests into the classroom. “the classroom because their culture is present, acknowledged, and recognized as having value in the artifacts of the class and the examples that are used in lessons. At the very least, they experience curiosity and respect for their cultural norms and values.”³ Students seemed to express interest in video games and super heroes, among other interests. I then implemented games into a lesson plan on Natural Selection, as well as super heroes into a lesson on genetic mutations. There was positive student feedback from both lessons. I saw an increase in interest and serious student participation during these lessons.

A student approached me requesting to have some kind of video game club. There can be several benefits of hosting such a club, as emphasized here in an excerpt of a dissertation by Nick Lenk, a pioneer of the video game club “Afterschool programs have historically offered children a place to share their interests with others in the school whom they may not know share the same passions while in a safe, adult led, environment. This embraces students learning through their autobiographical experiences, as they learn through their own guided interest that they will then often take back into the classroom”¹

After announcing the club, the response was overwhelming, several students expressed interest and were excited to be part of a community that shared their interests.

The following is an outline of the project including the Habits of Mind, 7 Essential Elements, and the Results.

TARGET HABITS OF MIND

“A habit of mind is a composite of many skills, attitudes, cues, past experiences, and proclivities.” The goal is to enhance a students ability to *produce* knowledge and ideas rather than simply reproducing.⁴

The following are the 3 Habits of Mind selected for the project. The target group of students are students that struggle in these particular areas.



Applying past knowledge to new situations: use what you know! Relating new ideas to ideas you are familiar with



Listening with understanding and empathy: understanding others through productive conversations between students and teachers



Finding humor: cultivating joy in the classroom through cultural references

RESULTS

The club is made up of 20 7th and 8th grade students of varying gaming experience. 12 of these students are in my 8th grade General Science course, I was able to track the academic progress of these students.

First, I utilized collaborative Rule Building grounded in school policy that has been outlined in the handbook. (Figure 1) There was some freedom here because this is an afterschool program. The students were allowed to use terms they associate with. Rule number 1 translates to having a positive attitude and using respectful language. Rule number 2 is in regards to good sportsmanship. Rule 3 is simply being respectful of others’ belongings including gaming equipment.

When implementing Habits of Mind, anecdotal and observational data showed an improvement teamwork, communication, and attitude. In Figure 2 students can be seen playing games on the projector. Many of the games require teamwork, effective communication, and complex analysis based on accumulated and shared knowledge.

A positive change in attitude was seen in the classroom and for several students this was reflective of their change in grade average. (Chart 1) A few club members expressed interest in game development and computer programming. This led me towards the development of a unit on coding based on serious gaming. These students have began to take the time in the club playing games which are based on fundamentals of coding and building comfort trouble shooting.

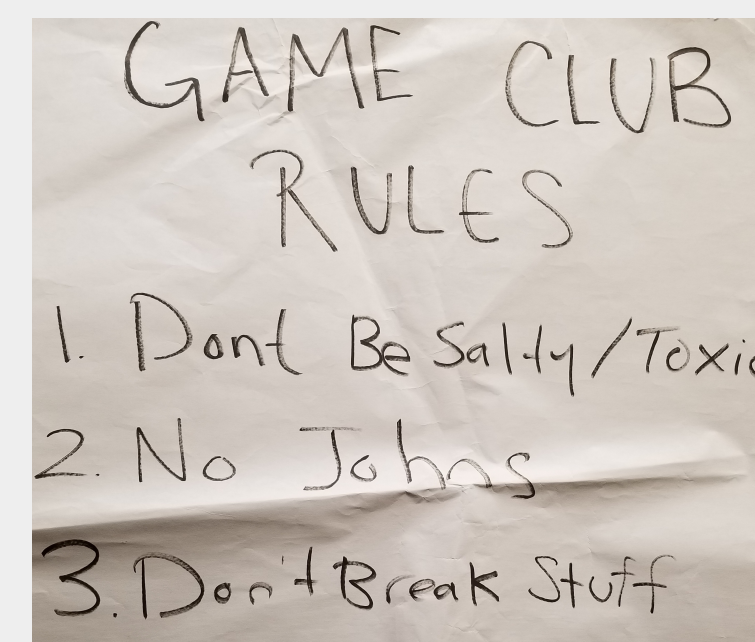


Figure 1. “Game Club Rules”

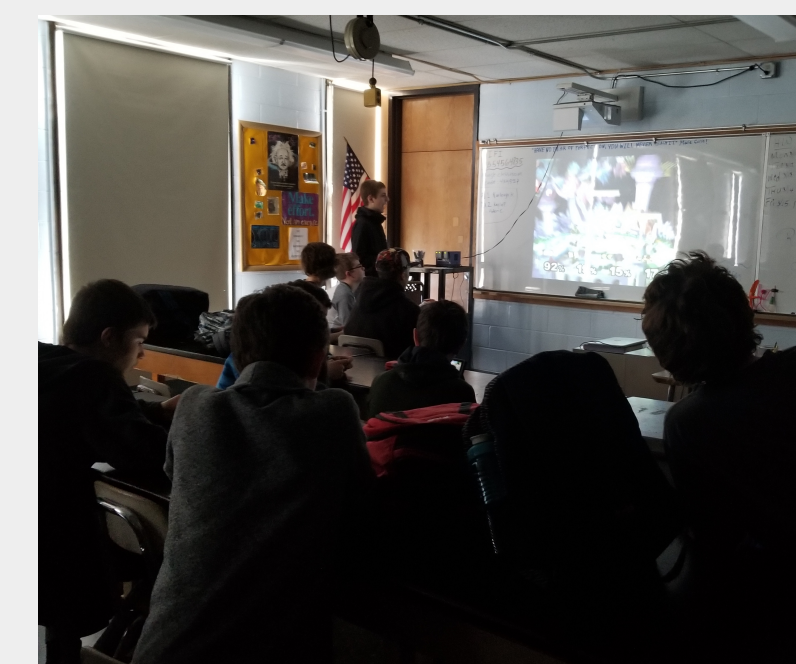


Figure 2. Students playing Game Cube on the Projector

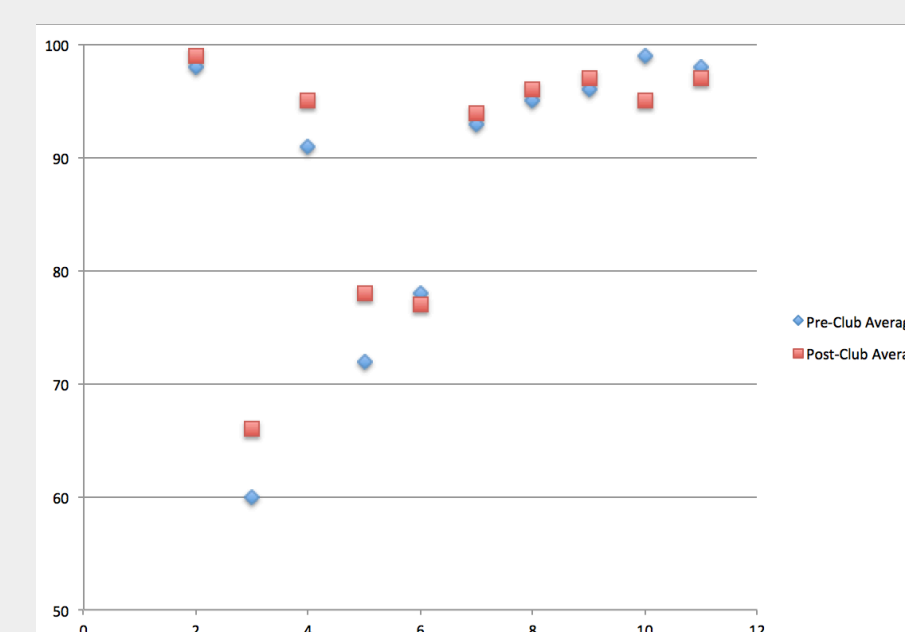


Chart 1. Club Member grades Pre Vs. Post Club Implementation

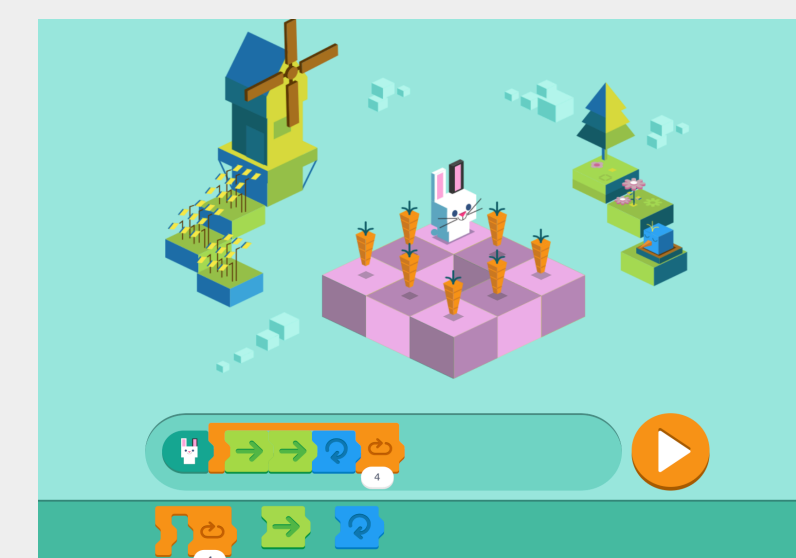


Figure 3. Serious Gaming

7 ESSENTIAL DESIGN ELEMENTS

Challenging a problem or question My challenge for the students was incorporated around the habits of mind- challenging students with social/ academic struggles

Sustained inquiry

The focus was to get students talking about their interests, opening up about their struggles, and identifying improvements they can make in the classroom

Authenticity

It was an authentic platform, not only did our discussions give students time to talk about themselves in positive ways, but it also allowed me to make visible changes in the classroom. For students, having that say matters

Student Voice and Choice

Student choice and voice was at the core of try 1: where students were given a place where they had a voice

Reflection

Much of the time spent with students was talking about how they can/have improved. Having this time of reflection is important

Critique and revision

students are given advice for in and out of school

Public product

Lesson plans created from their ideas- but unexpectedly the inception and implementation of a game club in the school

CONCLUSIONS

Just like any other afterschool club, giving students a positive environment to share a common interest and work collaboratively with their peers can be beneficial both inside and outside of school. More data must be collected to provide a significant conclusion to improvement of grade average in school as a result of the project.

To continue, I will keep developing a computer science plan to supplement the current Engineering Unit, as part of the 8th Grade standards. I will also continue to learn more about student interest and work on modifying lessons to better integrate these interests into my learning plans.

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